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### EU-NATO relations

**Citation for published version:**

Smith, SJ & Gebhard, C 2017, 'EU-NATO relations: Running on the fumes of informed deconfliction', *European Security*, vol. 26, no. 3, pp. 303-314. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2017.1352581>

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.1080/09662839.2017.1352581](https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2017.1352581)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Published In:**

European Security

**Publisher Rights Statement:**

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *European Security* on 17 Aug 2017, available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09662839.2017.1352581>

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## **Special Issue Introduction (published in *European Security*, Vol. 26(3))**

### **EU-NATO Relations: Running on the Fumes of Informed Deconfliction**

**ABSTRACT:** This article provides the framework for the contributions to this special issue. It first puts the theme into context and outlines the main issues that justify further analytical engagement with EU-NATO relations to the extent we propose here. We then provide some historical background to frame the discussion, and in doing so, also outline the current state of interaction between the EU and NATO. We then briefly contextualise the changing strategic environment shaping the relationship, including recent proposals to implement their declared “strategic partnership”. This introduction then presents an overview of the existing literature to set the stage for a renewed look at the research agenda that has emerged over the last two decades. We close with an outline of the individual contributions to this special issue, which are presented in two sections: one focusing on theoretical and conceptual approaches to the study of EU of EU-NATO relations, and one on the inter-organizational relationship in practice, followed by a concluding synopsis and outlook.

**Keywords:** EU-NATO; inter-organizationalism; transatlantic security; Common Security and Defence Policy; Defence and Security; Strategy

### **Introduction\***

It is quite extraordinary that after almost twenty years (if St. Malo is taken as a starting point) of formal inter-organizational relations between the European Union (EU) (and its Common Security and Defence Policy, CSDP, respectively) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), no special issue has yet been devoted to investigating interactions between them; especially given the fact that the two organizations are fundamental to underwriting European

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\* As editors of this special issue, we would first like to thank all the contributors for their dedication and hard work on the project. We also owe special thanks to Sven Biscop at Egmont (the Royal Institute for International Relations in Brussels) for hosting our workshop in November 2016 and for facilitating contact with Joe Coelmont and Diego Ruiz Palmer. Their comments as well as those of Jocelyn Mawdsley and all the anonymous referees involved in the review of both the individual articles and the volume as a whole have been instrumental to the process. Finally, thank you to the editorial team at *European Security* for all their patience and support.

and Transatlantic security. While the scholarly literature on the EU and NATO has grown over time, gaps remain with regard to the way in which the relationship *between them* is theorised, conceptualised and studied in various empirical contexts.

The first section of the special issue focuses on theoretical and conceptual approaches to the study of EU-NATO (Koops 2017, Græger 2017, Smith, Tomic and Gebhard 2017, Duke and Gebhard 2017), followed by a more empirical section on key issues occupying the two organizations in their relationship with each other (Fiott 2017, Lavallée 2017, Mayer 2017). In this introduction, we aim to contextualise and provide a historical, thematic and analytical backdrop to the individual contributions to this volume, and position our work in the existing literature.

### **A brief historical overview**

For almost fifteen years, the EU and NATO have claimed to partake in a particular organizational relationship,<sup>i</sup> a purported “Strategic Partnership”, set out in the so-called Berlin Plus agreements of 2002 as “the comprehensive framework for EU-NATO permanent relations” (EU-NATO 2003). With their large overlaps in membership and seemingly obvious need for convergence in strategic terms, the launch of such an official partnership would hardly have been perceived as ground-breaking or particularly contestable. Yet, this impression overlooks a number of organizational challenges the relationship faces to this day. They entered the “strategic partnership” at a time where both were undergoing fundamental political and institutional changes: NATO was engaged in its comprehensive remake from a regional military alliance to a global security organization (Wallander 2000, Wolff 2009), while the EU was in the process of launching its first crisis management operation, marking the launch of its own security and defence policy (Grevi, Helly and Keohane 2009). As a military alliance, NATO is traditionally understood as the provider of a “hard” security umbrella for the

continent, which has ensured defence guarantees among allies, and most importantly from the United States of America (USA) since 1949. The EU, while an economic giant with an almost equally long organizational history, has entered the field of security provision relatively late, and is therefore perceived as the junior partner in the relationship, at least when it comes to providing “hard security”. Conceptions of the EU as a “soft”, “normative” (Manners 2002), and mostly “civilian” (Bull 1982, Orbie 2006) power have long been incorporated into mainstream debates. This has reinforced the dominant “Atlanticist” view that the CSDP is more of a European experiment at “doing security” in the form of crisis management, security sector reform and stabilization while NATO has mainly remained an organizational and strategic point of reference for territorial defence with ambitions in the area of more robust expeditionary “out of area” security operations (see Zyla 2016).<sup>ii</sup> In reality, both organisations inched away from their traditional comfort zones towards a collective security middle ground from the late 1990s onwards, leading to academic discussion of organisational rivalry and ‘competition’ (Cornish 2006) . However, NATO seems to have gone back to its “roots” somewhat more recently (Major 2015).

Against this backdrop and in light of the discussions about the functional relationship between these two different yet historically entangled organizations, the Berlin Plus agreement and Agreed Framework were created to ensure that if NATO could not – or more plausibly, would not – engage in a particular operational context, the EU could do so under its own political guidance and chain of command but via “presumed access” to NATO assets and capabilities. More broadly, this framework for cooperation provides the EU/CSDP “‘assured access to NATO planning’ (SHAPE), ‘presumed access to NATO assets and capabilities’ and a predesignated European-only chain of command under the Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe” (Howorth 2014, p. 78). Yet despite this, Berlin Plus has not been adopted for any new EU military missions since it was implemented in 2004 for Operation Althea in

Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although the Berlin Plus arrangements are technically still in place and remain the operational framework for Althea, any subsequent lack of implementation is largely due to a political stalemate arising from the so-called “participation problem” (see Smith 2011), which is further outlined in the subsequent section.

### **Moving Beyond the “Participation Problem”**

The purported “strategic” partnership between the EU and NATO is widely understood to be problematic, by both academics and practitioners. Discussions about EU-NATO relations are rarely discussed without at least a reference to the long-standing political blockages between them. The constraints arising from the so-called “participation problem” are well-covered terrain in the literature, and will be drawn on by most articles in this special issue. The problem is well-known to arise from the membership of Turkey in NATO but not the EU on the one hand, and Cyprus’ membership in the EU but not NATO on the other.

Leading up to the signing of the Berlin Plus agreements in 2004, and in view of Cyprus’ upcoming accession to the EU, Turkey sought to ensure that no future EU member state would be allowed to interact directly with NATO decision-making unless they had a security agreement in place, thus clearly targeting Cyprus with their attempts to bend the arrangements. Institutional red lines arose and have remained in place since. NATO member Turkey has been blocking any attempt at establishing stronger formal cooperative ties between the alliance and the EU. It does so “mainly by denying Cypriot (and until 2008, Maltese) participation in EU–NATO meetings” (Gebhard and Smith 2015, p. 110).<sup>iii</sup> As a non-NATO and non-Partnership for Peace (PfP) member, Cyprus has in turn blocked formal cooperation between the EU and Turkey from within the EU, such as in the context of Turkey’s involvement in the European Defence Agency (EDA) (Duke 2008, p. 39). Most importantly, the continued political deadlock between Turkey and Cyprus has hampered political progress towards a more comprehensive –

and compared to the existing Berlin Plus arrangements, more functional – inter-organizational relationship.

The repercussions of this political problem and an ensuing “cooperation failure” (Biermann 2015) have never ceased to preoccupy scholars with an interest in EU-NATO relations. However, this special issue is premised on the view that the complex nature of the formal, informal and operational relationship between the two organizations warrants deeper investigation, both theoretically and empirically. While the proposed special issue does not challenge the notion that the relationship is problematic, it does challenge the argument that the EU and NATO simply do not cooperate – an argument that is arguably very limited in its value and empirical evidence. In fact, the editors and contributors to this special issue argue that the two organizations cooperate far more, albeit less efficiently, outside of the formal Agreed Framework for cooperation. According to the formal rules of Berlin Plus/Agreed Framework, the EU and NATO should, in practice, not be cooperating at all outside the Bosnia Herzegovina (Althea) context. This is clearly not the case, as has been argued in earlier works by the editors and others, and which will be further developed in this special issue.

That said, leaving aside recent efforts from both EU and NATO officials to reset relations, it is the firm view of the editors of this special issue that the established inter-organizational practice of “informed deconfliction” (Smith 2015), of staff on both sides consciously circumventing institutional red lines through informal and improvised channels, is not a sustainable approach for managing the complexity of the contemporary security environment in Europe and across the Atlantic.

### **A Changing Strategic Context**

For as much as the EU and NATO have been found to lack “respective strategic specificity” (Duke and Vanhoonacker 2016, p. 153), i.e. a clear enough distinction between their political

and organizational mandates to define their functional relationship as security organizations, their strategic environment is largely conditioned by very similar factors and challenges. This important commonality clearly emerges from strategic assessments made periodically by each organization and is also echoed repeatedly in joint declarations (see e.g. European Commission 2017a, European Union 2016, NATO 2010, 2014).

Most contemporary analyses of the two organization's strategic environment revolve around three key issues: the West's deteriorating relationship with Russia, particularly following the events in Ukraine since 2014, the continued instability in the Middle East, since 2011, exacerbated by a civil war in Syria and by the continuously unwieldy ISIS, and the constant threat posed by terrorism both in the region and across EU and NATO territories. More recently, the Euro-Atlantic community has also been tested by US president Donald Trump's mercurial behaviour, not least because of the way it challenges the liberal consensus underlying both the EU and NATO as well as the transatlantic relationship more broadly. That said, the unpredictable nature of his foreign policy has potentially also fuelled a new sense of responsibility and ownership among European leaders. Equally, Brexit appears to have, on the one hand, created a new dynamic within the EU as recent moves towards enhanced European defence cooperation suggest (see European Commission 2017). On the other, the political fallout triggered by the EU-referendum in Britain has most certainly created further institutional, diplomatic, budgetary and capability-related complications for the EU's CSDP (and CFSP more generally), likely affecting relations with NATO as well (see further Jain 2017). What is more, 2016 and 2017 have seen a deterioration of Western relationships with NATO member country Turkey. An escalating dispute with Turkey is likely to further disrupt and complicate the functional relationship between the two organizations, and to affect key bilateral relationships between Turkey and individual member states. What is common to all these challenges is the way in which they seemingly boost European political ambitions to

renew the “transatlantic bargain” to substantiate the original idea of a “strategic relationship” as it now seems more necessary than it was at one point desirable.

On 8 July 2016, the Presidents of the European Council and the Commission as well the NATO Secretary General (although importantly not the Member States themselves) signed the EU-NATO Joint Declaration (European Council, 2016a). The Declaration states that “today, the Euro-Atlantic community is facing unprecedented challenges emanating from the South and East” (ibid). To “address” these challenges, the document addresses seven key areas in particular: “hybrid threats”, “operational cooperation”, “cyber security and defence”, “defence capabilities”, “defence industry”, “coordination on exercises” and “capacity”. In September 2017, the EU further decided to give new impetus to the European External security and defence in what is referred to as a “challenging geopolitical environment” in the document and to “start implementing the joint declaration with NATO immediately” (European Council 2016b).

Leaving aside the fact that “immediately” was two months after the Joint Declaration was signed, it has been a rather busy period for EU-NATO activity. December 2016 saw the European Council adopt conclusions to implement the Joint Declaration including 42 action points (European Council 2016c). Finally, in June 2017, a “Progress report on the implementation of the common set of proposals endorsed by NATO and EU Councils” was released. This document states that the political efforts of the last year had seen “substantial results” and “a change in the culture, quality and dynamics of [...] engagement” (NATO 2017). As editors of this special issue, we propose that this flurry of recent activity warrants renewed conceptual, theoretical and empirical engagement with EU-NATO relations both to contribute to ongoing and long-standing debates and to point out avenues for future analysis and research.



## **The State of the Art and the contributions to this volume**

Each organization, the EU/CSDP and NATO, has garnered abundant scholarly interest. Theoretical accounts of each organization have also evolved steadily over the years, more so of the EU/CSDP than of NATO.<sup>iv</sup> Arguably, work on the relationship between the two organizations is more limited both in number and in scope (albeit less so with work examining the wider relationship between the US and Europe, e.g. Art 2004, Steffenson 2005, Rees 2011). However, scholarship has evolved in line with this oft-cited “unstrategic” partnership (Koops 2010) and is more disparate than it is underdeveloped per se.

The first surge in the EU-NATO literature was overwhelmingly devoted to recounting the political impetus behind the creation of the ESDP (now CSDP), and the negotiations that finally led up to “working out the Berlin Plus arrangements” (Yost 2007, p. 74, Schimmelfennig 2003, Whitman, 2004, Peters 2004, Gnesotto 2004, Touzovskaia 2006, Flockhart 2011). A second strand in the literature focused more on specific operations and on investigating (predominantly empirically) the performance of Berlin Plus operations (Concordia and Althea) as well as operations where the EU operated autonomously from NATO (Artemis) (e.g. Mace 2004; Grevi et al. 2009; Petrov 2010).

From 2008, and coinciding with NATO’s drawdown in Afghanistan, more consideration was given to unpacking “political realities” (Howorth 2009, Mayer 2011, Schleich 2014, Duke and Vanhoonacker 2016) between the two organizations as well as analysing practical cooperation on the ground where the EU and NATO operated in the same mission spaces (Muratore 2010, Lachmann 2010, Smith 2011, 2014, Howorth 2012, 2014, Gebhard and Smith 2015, Smith 2015) as well as in the offices and institutions in Brussels (Græger and Haugevik 2011, Græger 2014).

Beyond their idiosyncratic and historical importance for transatlantic and European security, EU-NATO relations have of course also attracted analytical interest through the way they

engage existing conceptualizations and theories about security organizations, including in previous work of some of the contributors of this special issue (Koops 2011, 2012, Smith 2011 Græger 2014, 2016). Theoretically orientated work on EU-NATO, however, has thus far remained at the margins of the literature although some rare exceptions exist (see Schimmelfennig 2003, Posen 2004, Ojanen 2006, Lachmann 2010, Reichard 2013, and the symposium edited by Karp and Karp 2013).

The first section of this special issue brings together four articles that aim to develop existing theoretical and conceptual perspectives on the study of EU-NATO relations. First, Joachim Koops (2017) discusses the issue as a case of inter-organizational cooperation, convergence and overlap. He argues that EU-NATO has had a “catalytic effect” in the literature, inspiring a bulk of work on inter-organizationalism and the development of a range of key conceptualizations and more theoretical approaches that together make up a burgeoning yet somewhat disparate subfield in organizational studies and IR. In a comprehensive stock-taking exercise he produces a synopsis of existing work to identify the most fruitful avenues for future theory-guided research into the case and beyond. His argument culminates in a newly revisited research agenda of inter-organizationalism that reaches beyond the idiosyncrasies of the case and beyond the confines of security and defence policy.

Second and following on from Koops’ conclusions about effectively framing the EU-NATO relationship in theoretical and conceptual terms, Nina Græger (2017) further develops an actor-centric approach through practice theory to study how the two organizations interact with each other at the tactical and micro level. The aim is to complement the dominant focus in the existing literature on wider political issues and strategic questions surrounding the relationship between the two organizations. She argues that practice approaches are particularly well suited to capture the logic at work in informal EU-NATO staff encounters, both in the everyday and in exceptional situations. Her research shows that the logic of practicality is especially visible

among professionals who share certain background conditions, such as education and training, and experience.

Simon J. Smith, Nikola Tomic and Carmen Gebhard (2017) introduce an inductive perspective to develop existing perspectives on EU-NATO cooperation and interaction. Their analysis focuses on an aspect of this inter-organizational relationship that has thus far received surprisingly little scholarly attention: decision-making in and between NATO's North Atlantic Council (NAC) and the EU's Political and Security Committee (PSC). Through their use of the Grounded Theory (GT) method, they consciously depart from the bulk of existing work in the IR literature that is widely dominated by a deductive, theory-testing approach, and even more so, by largely atheoretical "analytical" frameworks that fall short of problematizing their very starting assumptions. Their findings emphasize the impact of both structural and more agency-related categories, pointing to potential new avenues in the study of the crucial decision-making fora at the heart of the EU-NATO strategic partnership.

In their article on the West's "integration dilemma", Simon Duke and Carmen Gebhard (2017) look at the way in which events in Ukraine have rekindled discussions about NATO's post-Cold War purpose and the way it relates to the EU. They argue that, through EU sanctions and a traditional military response from NATO, the West has manoeuvred itself into an "integration dilemma", i.e. a paradoxical situation where every step it takes to reassure its Eastern allies increases rather than diffuses tensions with Russia. They juxtapose this argument with the application of the a classic neorealist "security dilemma" to develop a more clear-cut conceptualisation of this complex geostrategic challenge. They argue that NATO's robust reaction to the crisis in Ukraine might have been based on a stylised threat and historical resentments rather than on a carefully calculated risk. They also argue that the current situation can only be resolved by re-engaging Russia in a renewed de-escalatory dialogue.

The second section of this special issue concerns itself with the practical and operational level and investigates whether the nature of the relationship is demand driven and based on particular situations on the ground, supply driven and based on common EU-NATO goals, or some combination of the two. Daniel Fiott (2017) asks whether current institutional arrangements between the two organizations are best suited to address the challenges associated with defence globalisation. The EU and NATO are both fora through which European states can engage in European defence-industrial cooperation. Each organization has developed a unique set of institutional tools through which to manage issues such as the high and rising costs of defence procurement (“techflation”), technological innovation, defence R&D, standardisation, multinational capability programmes and interoperability. In short, the EU and NATO are seen as institutional vessels through which European states can manage the positive effects and negative consequences of “defence globalisation”.

Chantal Lavallée’s (2017) article on NATO air policing in the Single European Sky argues that a new opportunity for EU-NATO relations has emerged due to military linkages with the European Defence Agency. In the last decade, NATO and the EU have put airspace firmly on their political agenda. In the framework of the Integrated Air and Missile Defence System, NATO’s Air Command and Control System programme has become a driving project of smart defence to improve civil-military interoperability and information-sharing among member states. The EU’s Single European Sky (SES) has been developed to harmonise civilian management of the European airspace in order to increase safety standards. In order to set new standards for air policing in Europe, both organizations promote close coordination between civilian and military users. The article conceptualises both institutions as “structures of power” that have interests beyond just making Europe’s skies safer and more secure. By assuming that inter- and intra-institutional power play is evident, the article presents the underlying convergences and differences of both initiatives. It identifies the

actors involved and their logics of action, tools, means and resources to better understand the development of each initiative. Ultimately, it assesses the challenges, limits and the unintended consequences of behaviour in this emerging field of cooperation.

Sebastian Mayer (2017), takes the case of Georgia to assess both EU and NATO security strategies respectively. Focusing on fragile Georgia since the mid-2000s, the article takes a country-centred perspective in its approach. With its two breakaway regions and frequent Russian penetration into its internal affairs, the country has long pursued a strategic orientation towards the West to escape pressure of its northern neighbour. While both organizations have excluded admitting Georgia to its ranks in the foreseeable future, they have devised multifaceted outreach strategies below full membership to help build stability. They include bilateral schemes within NATO's Partnership for Peace and the EU's Eastern Partnership as well as the large-scale CSDP Monitoring Mission arranged after the Russo-Georgian war of August 2008. The chiefly empirical contribution unpacks and compares these strategies to assess their potential for complementarity, possible overlap and institutional competition, as well as overall effectiveness.

The collection closes with Jolyon Howorth's (2017, PAGE NUMBER ONCE IN PRODUCTION) analytical synopsis of EU-NATO cooperation and the transatlantic relationship *writ large* as well as a reverberation of the central conclusions of the articles brought together in this special issue. Howorth argues that EU-NATO cooperation is, in fact, the "Key to Europe's Security Future". By way of conclusion, he posits three divergent scenarios ranging from the "gradual unravelling of European integration itself" with considerable ramifications for European "strategic autonomy"; to a situation whereby "significant progress" in EU-NATO relations is achieved but still falls short of full strategic autonomy for Europe; and finally to a scenario where the EU indeed does become a strategically autonomous actor by way of the "Europeanization of NATO".

Thus, overall, this special issue follows three main objectives: (1) synthesize the state of the art in the conceptual, theoretical and empirical literature on EU-NATO (Koops 2017, and this introduction), (2) propose some new analytical approaches and potential avenues for further research (Koops 2017, Græger 2017, Smith, Tomic and Gebhard 2017, Duke and Gebhard 2017, Howorth 2017) and (3) develop further empirical evidence on the nature, performance and prospects of this crucial inter-organizational relationship (Fiott 2017, Lavallée 2017, Mayer 2017). Given the many challenges the two organizations are facing both on their own and in relation to each other, discussions will likely continue beyond the foreseeable future. We consider this volume to provide another step towards a better understanding of the many institutional, political and strategic ramifications that new developments in this relationship have for the Euro-Atlantic community.

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<sup>i</sup> The strategic relationship between NATO and the EU (and before, the European Communities) of course predates the official launch of the official “strategic partnership” in 2002. A comprehensive historical review of the “transatlantic bargain” back to the 1950s would clearly go beyond the scope of this introductory article (see Duke 2000, Sloan 2010).

<sup>ii</sup> Beyond such polar characterizations, questions about relevance have at times haunted both organizations: NATO in particular after the end of the Cold War as well as in the wake of 9/11 and in the context of the Iraq War of 2003 (e.g. Rynning 2005, Medcalf 2008), and the EU since the inception of the CFSP and the establishment of a security and defence organization in 1999 (e.g. Duke 2000, Shepherd 2006, Howorth 2012).

<sup>iii</sup> More recently, between November 2016 and May 2017, Turkey resorted to blocking NATO cooperation with partner countries including EU member states Austria, Finland, Ireland and Sweden. This move alongside a number of diplomatic clashes over the EU’s migration policy and Turkey’s quest for EU accession have led to further marginalization of Turkey within the alliance (for a recent account of Turkish foreign policy see Aras 2017, Haferlach, Tekin and Wódka 2017).

<sup>iv</sup> See Howorth 2011 and 2014, and Webber 2016 respectively for comprehensive literature reviews on each the EU and NATO.